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Viewing cable 06SANSALVADOR2008, EL SALVADOR: FMLN'S LAST MODERATE REFLECTS ON

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06SANSALVADOR2008	2006-08-14 20:12	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Salvador

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.wikileaks.elfaro.net/es/201106/notas/4565/>

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSN #2008/01 2262012
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 142012Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3423
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 002008

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/13/2016
TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: FMLN'S LAST MODERATE REFLECTS ON
PARTY'S FUTURE

REF: A. 2005 SAN SALVADOR 3259
 B. SAN SALVADOR 1736
 C. SAN SALVADOR 1849

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a wide-ranging discussion with poloff, moderate FMLN Legislative Assembly Deputy Hugo Martinez commented on the deadly July 5 violence tied to the FMLN (reftel B), and speculated on his party's prospects for the 2009 presidential elections. The conciliatory tone of Martinez's message, likely coordinated beforehand with the party's orthodox leadership, appeared to be an effort at mending relations with the Embassy, which have been strained recently by the July 5 events and in the face of FMLN opposition to CAFTA, the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), and the proposed Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) project for El Salvador. Martinez's longterm future in the FMLN remains uncertain at best, but his Legislative Assembly seat appears secure until at least 2009. END SUMMARY.

Background

¶2. (C) During the 2003-2006 Legislative Assembly, seven moderate FMLN Legislative Assembly deputies (of the party's total delegation of 31) were either expelled or departed voluntarily, and went on to form the new Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR). (Note: None of the seven won reelection in March, although the FDR party has been granted official status by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), and remains active. End note.) Moderate--and highly-popular--mayors such as San Salvador Mayor Carlos Rivas Zamora, Santa Ana Mayor Orlando Mena, and Nejapa Mayor Rene Canjura likewise departed the FMLN either voluntarily or otherwise since 2004. In the wake of all these purges, 38-year-old Deputy Hugo Martinez remains perhaps the highest-profile moderate in a party where voices of dissent are almost extinct.

FMLN "Reflection" In the Wake of July 5 Violence

¶3. (C) Martinez immediately broached the subject of the July 5 riots at the University of El Salvador, during which a sniper with close ties to the FMLN killed two policemen and wounded at least 10 others, in what clearly appeared to be a premeditated ambush (see reftel B). Martinez lamented the week-long lapse between the killings and any expressions of condemnation or condolences by his party's leadership, and confirmed that this was primarily due to ongoing internal struggles among several hardliner factions. He added, almost contritely, that the police killings had led to serious reflection and self-examination within the party, and outlined how he had boldly proclaimed to the party leadership that if there were any who contemplated a return to an armed struggle for power such as the nation experienced from 1980 until 1992, he would not be accompanying the FMLN in any such effort. (Note: These sentiments regarding July 5 were likely in response to the Ambassador's criticism of possible FMLN complicity in the killings, which was made clear to the FMLN leadership during a July 12 luncheon. See reftel C. End note.)

Looking Ahead to 2009

¶4. (C) Turning to 2009, when for the first time since 1994, elections will be held simultaneously for president, the Legislative Assembly, and all 262 mayoralties, Martinez outlined that factions are already forming within the FMLN in support of various alternate strategies. Asked about popular Santa Tecla Mayor Oscar Ortiz's recent overtures regarding a possible presidential candidacy, Martinez hewed to his party's official line that any such unilateral declarations are perhaps premature, and he admitted that chilly relations now exist between Ortiz and the FMLN leadership. He pointed out that San Salvador Mayor Violeta Menjivar remained an obvious possible presidential candidate. Perhaps most interestingly, he described how a number of influential women within the party, including Political Commission members

Norma Guevara, Lilian Coto, and Deputy Blanca Flor Bonilla, consider party outsiders such as television commentators Mauricio Funes and Arturo Zablah as being most electable, but that others fear that any such candidate might lack discipline and political reliability. Martinez laughed off a question regarding his own possible candidacy, simply saying that he was regarded as too "independent" to merit serious consideration as a candidate. Lastly, in speculating as to whom an FMLN presidential candidate might face in 2009,

Martinez disclosed that he had heard credible accounts that charismatic and widely-admired former Foreign Minister (1999-2004) Maria Eugenia "Mayu" Brizuela de Avila had already declined an offer from ARENA's executive committee (COENA), citing the sacrifices that her term as foreign minister had entailed for her family.

¶5. (C) Martinez was surprisingly critical of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, whom he characterized as a bombastic autocrat who uses a hypothetical invasion of Venezuela by the U.S. to manipulate public opinion and silence dissent. He conceded that certain high-ranking FMLN officials maintained close ties with Chavez, although he pleaded ignorance as to the details of any such relationships. (Note: The powerful but shadowy FMLN strategist Jose Luis Merino is widely believed to be funneling Venezuelan funds to the FMLN through an elaborate international network of bank accounts and small businesses; see reftel A. End note.) When asked about the polarized and uncooperative atmosphere prevalent in the Assembly, Martinez offhandedly suggested that the ruling ARENA party would succeed in passing a federal budget by employing a technicality to avoid the two-thirds vote needed for assumption of external debt, which would require three or more FMLN deputies. He foresees the administration incurring further debt by guaranteeing needed loans with public pension funds, and he speculated that any FMLN appeal to the Supreme Court as to the constitutionality of such a measure would fail.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Martinez's comments appeared carefully crafted to reach out to the Embassy. Although Martinez will almost certainly serve out his full term in the Legislative Assembly, his longer-term fortunes in the now lockstep-orthodox FMLN remain unclear. His mentor, Fabio Castillo, a stalwart party caudillo and close ally of late party strongman Schafik Handal, had heretofore inoculated Martinez from attacks by hardliners, but with Handal gone and Castillo retired from active political life, Martinez now lacks such protection. Given the departure of other FMLN moderates and the loss of his most important defenders, Martinez's political staying power is little short of remarkable.

Butler